DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 104 164 FL 006 822

AUTHOR Karsen, Sonja
TITLE Literature in Translation: Trend or Necessity?
PUB DATE Mar 75
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the International Conference of the Ontario Modern Language Teachers Association and the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers (4th, Toronto, Ontario, March 1, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *College Language Programs; Course Descriptions; English Departments; Enrollment Influences; Higher Education; Language Enrollment; *Language Instruction; Literature; *Literature Programs; *Modern Language Curriculum; Second Language Learning; *Translation

ABSTRACT

This paper concerns the practice of adopting literature in translation courses and civilization courses taught in English as a way of increasing foreign language enrollments at the undergraduate level. The need for cooperation between English and foreign language departments in coordinating courses is stressed, and several course titles are suggested. The types of courses in translation suggested by the 1973 ADE/ADFL Joint Summer Seminar are also listed. A course entitled "Literature and Revolution," offered at Skidmore College for the first time during the academic year 1974-75, is described in detail. The paper concludes with a discussion of the place of literature in translation courses in foreign language majors. (PMP)

ED104164

4. THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION: TREND OR NECESSITY ?

by

Sonja Karsen
Skidmore College

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRE
SENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

FL006822

Fourth International Conference of OMLTA and NYSAFLT
Toronto, March 1, 1975

LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION: TREND OR NECESSITY?

"Language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture, paints of pictures, or sounds of music."

René Wellek and Austin Warren

Those of us presently engaged in the teaching of foreign languages and literatures on the college or university level cannot help but notice that the ever decreasing enrollment figures in our discipline have affected our attitudes, methods and techniques. Recent statistics prove that the outlook is bleak indeed unless we can come up with a solution that will reverse the trend reported by the Modern Language Association in its Fall 1974 survey. The preliminary report found that "since 1965 the proportion of colleges requiring entering students to have studied foreign languages fell from 33.6 per cent to 19.4 per cent. The proportion making foreign language study a prerequisite for the bachelor's degree dropped from 88.9 per cent to 56 per cent...Once it was unheard of for a student to complete high school, much less college, without studying at least one foreign language; now students by the millions are graduating ignorant of any tongue but their own."[1] Between the fall of 1970 and the fall of 1972, college and university language registrations have decreased by 9.2 per cent, a loss of more than 100,000 students, with dramatic decreases in French (18.4%), German (12.6%) and even Spanish (6.3%)[2], the language which recently supplanted French as the most frequently studied foreign language in the United States.

The threatened existence of foreign language departments has had ramifications on a practical basis, as it has shown that the traditional curriculum needs to be augmented by more relevant and stimulating kinds of language offerings. One phenomenon in many institutions across the nation has been the introduction on the part of foreign language departments of literature in translation courses and to a lesser degree civilization courses in English. These have multiplied after 1970, as more and more institutions of higher learning dropped the language requirement either for entrance, graduation or both.[3]

Courses in translation have been taught in the past on a limited scale to supplement the regular offerings of a department or as part of such general courses as: "Western literature: The Modern World", "Contemporary European Drama","The Continental Novel: Twentieth Century" and others offered by the English department.

Ideally an effort should be made to coordinate programs in English and foreign languages and those departments should collaborate on courses dealing with the European novel, poetry and drama. This would mean that if García Lorca's, Sartre's, Brecht's or Pirandello's plays were to be included in a Contemporary European Drama course, they would be discussed by a member of the Spanish, French, German or Italian department respectively. Since professors of English and foreign languages are primarily specialists in literature, it would follow that courses taught jointly would provide the student with greater insights into the literatures studied than is the case at present. The ADE/ADFL Joint Summer Seminar, conducted at Washington University, St. Louis (25-29 June 1973) made certain suggestions along

these lines with respect to the types of courses in translation to be taught jointly or by either the English or foreign language departments:

1. Introductory literature courses to be taught by members of the English and foreign language departments.

2. Civilization and culture courses to be taught by foreign language departments.

3. Courses on world literature to be team taught by the English and foreign language departments.

4. Specialized areas in English and foreign literatures to be taught by specialists in the respective disciplines.

5. Advanced literature courses in English and foreign literatures to be taught be specialists in the field.

6. Comparative literature courses to be taught jointly by the English and foreign language departments.[4]

In this context courses could be taught either as a reflection of a certain period or as an expression of thehuman consciousness which transcends time. Successful courses have also been given on ethnic heritage, folklore and cultural geography. The following courses might fit these specifications: "The French Writer and the Non-European World", "Women in France since the Revolution", Literature and Revolution", "The Myth and Cinema", "The Theme of Justice", "German Expressionism", "Romanticism of the Continent", Nobel Laureates of the Hispanic World", and "The Culture of Latin America". In the case of "Literature and Revolution" which is being offered for the first time at Skidmore College this year, the fall semester was

taught by one member of the department whose specialty is Slavic and Italian literature. The first half of the course dealt with the transition from Russian to Soviet literature and the second half of the semester was devoted to an analysis of Italian literature under Mussolini, the belles-lettres in Nazi Germany, as well as Karel Čapek's anti-Nazi and anti-Communist themes. During the Spring semester this course will be team taught by five members of thedepartment of modern languages who are specialists in Latin American, Peninsular, contemporary French, German and Russian literature. Of the twelve lectures (the course meets only once a week for two and a half hours), three will deal with Latin American literature influenced by political events such as the novel of the Mexican Revolution, Asturia's El Señor Presidente, which describes Guatemalan politics during the 1920's and the "engagée" poetry of Chile's Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda. The fourth lecture will describe the hemisphere's most debated revolution: Castro's takeover of Cuba in 1959 and its literary ramifications if any. This is to be followed by a talk on the Spanish Civil War and its literary impact, because more than any other war in history it compelled the leading international writers of the era to take a stand. Lectures on Malraux and Aragon will be next and in turn they will yield to a class meeting devoted to the plays of Brecht. "Literature and Revolution will conclude with four sessions on contemporary Russian authors.

It might be suggested that these intra-departmental courses of the type just outlined be at the upper end of the curriculum, after students have learned something about English and American literatures. Skidmore College's experience with literature in translation courses has been

positive. The same holds true for colleagues reporting on this kind of course from Pace University, the College of St. Rose, SUNY at Albany, SUNY at Fredonia and Geneseo, Brooklyn College, Canisius College, Molloy College, Ithaca College, Rosary Hill College and Colgate University.[5]

The percentage of students from other disciplines taking literature in translation has increased steadily over the last five years. Quite often these very courses have proved to be a department's biggest drawing card and therefore, an effective way to boost sagging enrollments. The question that comes to mind immediately is: why are these courses so popular with students? Literature in translation offers a double exposure of confronting values, experiences and expressions. "Foreign literature can thus be an effective instrument of understanding other dimensions of human existence and self-perception pertaining to different contexts in space and time. It can serve to expand the literary and aesthetic experience of the student as well as to introduce him to essential features of foreign civilizations."[6]

Whether or not courses in translation should count toward the major in foreign languages and literatures is debatable. Many departments including the one at Skidmore College do not allow this, while others do with good results. However, when the college added a combined English and Modern Languages and Literatures major in 1974, a concession was made and students electing this specialization were allowed major credit for two courses in translation! This new major consists of a minimum of fourteen courses in English and Modern Languages and Literatures, equally devided between the two departments. The

seven courses taken in the department of Modern Languages and Literatures may be distributed as follows: in order to concentrate in one literature, a student must take at least five of the seven courses in the original language beyond the intermediate level, and the remaining two courses may be selected from the department's offerings in English. There is also an option which permits majors to concentrate in two languages and literatures in which case five of the seven courses must be in the original languages, three beyond the intermediate level in the language of major proficiency and two beyond the intermediate level in the second language. Here too, two courses may be from the department's offerings in English. In addition a joint project to be undertaken under the auspices of both departments must be completed during the senior year. Majors will have advisors in both departments who will pay particular attention to the intellectual coherence of work in English and Continental or Latin American literatures.

Let us hope that the great interest in teaching literature in translation will ultimately contribute to an increased collaboration between English and foreign language departments in programs which of necessity will become more flexible, as they "experiment with exchange teaching and team teaching in interdisciplinary language courses."[7]

Sonja Karsen
Skidmore College

NOTES

1 Gene I. Maeroff, "Foreign Language Study and its Fall from Grace," The New York Times, January 12, 1975.

2 "A National Foreign Language Program for the 1970's," ADFL Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 1(1974)8.

3 My remarks have grown out of my personal involvement with this field (the teaching of such courses at Skidmore College since the late 1950's), discussion with colleagues at other institutions and meetings with professional groups (ADFL,NEMLA,NYSAFLT). Also see Robert J. Nelson, "Courses in Translation: Whose Responsibility?," ADFL Bulletin, Vol.5, No. 1(1973)8-12; and Maria-Luise Caputo Mayr, "German Literature and Culture Courses in English: Trends in Pennsylvania," ADFL Bulletin, Vol. 6, No.2 (1974)47-50.

4 See Sonja Karsen, "Alternatives in College Foreign Language Programs," Language Association Bulletin, (November 1974), pp. 15-16.

5 Pace University has recently moved into the area of courses in translation and has a tacit understanding with the English department. In the new curriculum a required course in foreign literature or culture will have to be taken in the department of foreign languages in order to satisfy the requirements.--At the College of St. Rose more and more emphasis is placed on the collaboration of the English with the foreign language department regarding courses in translation.--Molloy College is working not only with the English department ("Literary Trends in European Literature"- team taught by the English, French and Spanish departments), but also with the philosophy department (Philosophical Problems in Contemporary Literature"- team taught by Philosophy, English, Spanish and French). In either of these courses students my claim three credits in any of the departments. --At Rosary Hill College courses in translation are offered in collaboration with the English department ("Alienation in European literature") and the History and Sociology departments ("The People and Culture of Puerto Rico"). Survey type courses in translation are offered by a large number of institutions in New York state: Brooklyn College (French and Spanish literature), Canisius College (French, German, Spanish and Russian literature), Ithaca College (French, German and Spanish literature) to mention but a few. See "Report of the Standing Committee on College Foreign Language Requirements and Curriculum, NYSAFLT, 56th Annual Meeting, Kiamesha Lake, N.Y., October 9, 1973," pp.7-12.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

6 "ADFL Summer Seminar," ADFL Bulletin, Vol.5, No. 1(1973) 12-13.

7 "A National Foreign Language Program for the 1970's," Op. cit., p. 12.